

Message Text

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SUBJECT: VENICE BIENNALE MEETINGS

1. THE SECOND PLANNING MEETING OF THE COMMISSIONERS OF FOREIGN PAVILIONS FOR THE 1978 BIENNALE WAS AS QUIET AN EVENT AS THE FIRST LAST JUNE. NORMALCY HAS RETURNED TO EVENTS DEALING WITH BIENNALE PLANNING, BUT NOT QUITE.

2. THE US WAS AGAIN REPRESENTED AT THE SEPTEMBER 23 MEETING BY WILDER GREENE OF THE COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITIONS, MILTON GENDEL, ROME-BASED ART CRITIC, AND LOIS ROTH, PROGRAM COORDINATOR, USIS, AMEMBASSY, ROME. WHILE NOT FREE TO DISCLOSE THE NAMES OF THE ARTISTS CHOSEN FOR THE AMERICAN PAVILION, GREENE CONVEYED HIS COMMITTEE'S PLEASURE WITH THE THEME "FROM NATURE TO ART AND ART TO NATURE," WHICH HAD BEEN TELEGRAPHICALLY APPROVED BY THE BIENNALE BOARD OF DIRECTORS IN JULY, AND ANNOUNCED THAT THE "UNITED STATES WOULD PARTICIPATE ACTIVELY."

3. BASICALLY, THE MEETINGS WERE ORGANIZED TO ALLOW FOREIGN COMMISSIONERS TO SHOW-AND-TELL FOR THE BIENNALE ORGANIZERS. QUESTIONS ABOUT WHO SHOULD ORGANIZE THE

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CENTRAL EXHIBITS AND THE SIZE AND FORMAT OF THE CATALOGUE WERE ALSO DISCUSSED, AS WAS A SUGGESTION TO HOLD AN ARTISTS' SYMPOSIUM EITHER PRIOR TO OR DURING THE BIENNALE BUT, TO QUOTE A LONG-TIME BIENNALE COMMISSIONER "THE BEST PART OF THE MEETINGS WAS THAT NOTHING HAPPENED AT ALL." THUS THE 1978 BIENNALE IS BACK ON THE TRACK AND THE DIFFICULTIES OF THE EARLY SEVENTIES

SEEM BEHIND US.

4. ONLY AT THE OPENING, WHEN BIENNALE PRESIDENT, CARLO RIPA DE MEANA SPOKE, AND AT THE CLOSING WHEN THE MINISTER OF CULTURE MARIO PEDINI, ADDRESSED THE GROUP, DID DISCUSSION TURN TO THE 1977 OFF-YEAR BIENNALE, DEALING WITH DISSENT IN EASTERN EUROPE. IN HIS OPENING REMARKS RIPA PROUDLY ANNOUNCED THAT THE BIENNALE WAS ALIVE AND WELL, IN GOOD FINANCIAL CONDITION AND WELL-PREPARED TO DEAL WITH THE DISSENT THEME. HE WAS OBVIOUSLY DEFENDING HIMSELF FROM A SPATE OF RECENT NEWSPAPER CRITICISM, THE MOST CAUSTIC OF WHICH ACCUSED HIM OF USING THE DISSENT THEME TO GET MORE MONEY FROM THE GOVERNMENT AND THEN HIDING THE "DISSENT BIENNALE" IN THE FOG AND HIGH WATERS OF NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER IN VENICE.

5. MINISTER PEDINI WAS NOT AT ALL DEFENSIVE. HE CONGRATULATED THE BIENNALE ON ITS 1977 THEME AND EXPRESSED THE GOVERNMENT'S VIEW THAT ALL MEN ARE ENTITLED TO ENJOY FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN ART, SCIENCE, AND IDEAS. HE STATED HIS PLEASURE, AS A MEMBER OF THE CABINET, THAT HIS GOVERNMENT HAD RESPONDED WELL TO THE BIENNALE AND FURTHER STATED THAT EVEN IF THE THEME OF DISSENT IS UNPLEASANT, IT IS ALWAYS NECESSARY TO CONCENTRATE ON HUMAN RIGHTS, AND VERY IMPORTANT FOR HIS COUNTRYMENT TO HAVE A GREATER AWARENESS OF THESE PROBLEMS. AT THE END OF HIS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PREPARED TEXT HE GAVE A BRIEF OFF-THE-CUFF NOD TO THE 1978 BIENNALE ON ART AND NATURE.

6. THE SINGLE REPRESENTATIVE FROM ALL THE EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, A YUGOSLAV, DID HIS BEST TO DISASSOCIATE HIMSELF FROM THE MINISTER'S REMARKS, COVERING HIS FOREHEAD WITH HIS HANDS. THE OTHER EASTERN EUROPEAN NATIONS WERE NOTICEABLY ABSENT FROM THE MEETINGS, EVEN THE ROMANIAN WHO ATTENDED THE JUNE MEETINGS WAS ABSENT. SPAIN AND MEXICO REJOINED THE BIENNALE AFTER AN ABSENCE CAUSED BY A 1976 CENTRAL EXHIBIT WHICH ATTACKED FRANCO SPAIN.

7. THE MEETINGS WENT SMOOTHLY AND ENDED EARLY. CORRIDOR RUMORS SAY THAT RIPA DE MEANA, WHOSE TERM AS PRESIDENT EXPIRES IN DECEMBER, WILL BE REAPPOINTED, BUT THAT VITTORIO GREGOTTI, HEAD OF THE VISUAL ARTS AND ARCHITECTURE SECTION, A MAINSTAY OF THE 1976 BIENNALE, HAS RESIGNED, AS HAVE THE DIRECTORS OF THE FILM DIVISION AND THE PERFORMING ARTS DIVISION.

8. COMMENT: WE ARE PLEASED WITH THE DIRECTION OF THE 1978

BIENNALE AND NOTES WITH SPECIAL PLEASURE THE PROMISE
OF ACTIVE SUPPORT FROM THE COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL
EXHIBITS AND THE COMMITTEE'S TENTATIVE PLANS FOR AN
EXHIBIT WHICH WILL GIVE US A HIGHER PROFILE IN 1978.
USIS ROME HAS UNDERTAKEN TO MAKE THE NECESSARY REPAIRS
AT THE PVAILLION AND WILL ATTEMPT TO RECRUIT A PAVILION
REPRESENTATIVE FOR THE COMMITTEE.HOLMES

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